

Tartu University  
Faculty of Social Sciences and Education  
Curriculum of School Management

Kristi Aria

EDUCATING THE INTERNATIONALLY MOBILE  
CHILDREN IN TARTU: THE EXPERIENCE OF  
THE FAMILIES ON THE MOVE

Master's Thesis

Supervisor: Karmen Trasberg

Running head: Educating Internationally Mobile Children

Tartu 2010

## Ülevaade

Käesolev magistritöö on koostatud teemal **“Rahvusvaheliselt mobiilsete laste õpetamisest Tartus välisperede kogemuste põhjal”**.

Seoses haridus- ja ärivaldkonna arengu ja globaliseerumisega on täheldatav rahvusvahelise mobiilsuse kasv. Rahvusvaheliselt mobiilseid ja vastuvõtval maal ajutiselt elavad peresid seostatakse reeglina võõrspetsialistide ja nende perekondadega.

Ühest riigist teise kolimine ei ole alati lihtne. Rahvusvaheliselt liikuvad pered peavad maha jätma oma tuntud ja turvalise keskkonna – kodu, sõbrad ja lähedased; vahetuvad keel ja kultuur, kliima ja maastik. Uude riiki kolimine võib eriti puudutada rahvusvaheliselt liikuvate perede lapsi, kes peavad kohanema uue kooliga, õppima ära uue keele ning leidma uued sõbrad. Seetõttu on rahvusvahelisi lapsi õpetavatel koolidel ülioluline roll nende laste kohanemise toetamises.

Inspiratsioon käesoleva uurimistöö temaatikaks tulenes selle autori igapäevatööst Tartu Rahvusvahelise Kooli juhataja ja inglise keele õpetajana.

Magistritöö eesmärk on uurida rahvusvaheliselt mobiilsete perede kogemusi seoses oma laste koolitamisega Tartus. Uurimiseesmärgi saavutamiseks püüti leida vastused järgmistele küsimustele:

- Mis on rahvusvaheliselt mobiilsete perede ootused haridusele Tartus?
- Kuidas toetasid vanemad oma laste kohanemist uues koolis?
- Kuidas toetasid koolid rahvusvaheliselt mobiilsete õpilaste kohanemist?
- Kuidas soodustasid koolid rahvusvaheliselt mobiilsete vanemate kaasamist?

Käesolev magistritöö koosneb teoreetilisest ja empiirilisest osast. Teoreetilises osas on kaks peatükki, mis käsitlevad järgmisi teemasid: rahvusvaheliselt mobiilsete perede dünaamika, rahvusvaheliselt mobiilsed lapsed ja siire, vanemate eelistused kooli valikul, kooli roll lapse kohanemises ja rahvusvaheliselt mobiilsete vanemate kaasatus kooli.

Magistritöö kolmas peatükk analüüsib, mida rahvusvaheliselt mobiilsed vanemad on kogenud seoses oma laste koolitamisega Tartus. Empiirilise uuringu jaoks viis autor läbi kuus kvalitatiivset intervjuud Tartus ajutiselt elavate rahvusvaheliste vanematega, kelle lapsed omandasid intervjuude läbiviimise hetkel põhiharidust Tartu koolides kas inglise või eesti keeles. Intervjuud lindistati ja transkribeeriti magistritöö autori poolt. Andmebaas kodeeriti viide kategooriasse: perede Tartusse kolimise põhjused ja ettevalmistus, koolivaliku kriteeriumid, uues koolis kohanemine, vanemate kaasatus ja vanemate ettepanekud. Andmeid analüüsiti kvalitatiivse kontentanalüüsi põhimõtete järgi.

Töö kolmanda peatüki viimases osas esitatakse empiirilisele uurimusele ja teooriale tuginevad soovitused koolidele ja haridusala otsustajatele rahvusvaheliselt mobiilsete õpilaste hariduse edendamiseks Tartus. Soovitused puudutavad järgmisi rahvusvaheliselt mobiilsete laste haridusega seotud valdkondi: perede toetamine Tartusse siirdumisel, keelealased toetusprogrammid, õppekava, vanemate kaasatus, rahvusvahelise hariduse mudeli väljatöötamine Tartus.

Keywords: internationally mobile children, transition, adjustment, parent involvement, third culture kids

## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	6
1. Families on the Move: The Family Profile and Transition Dynamics .....	8
1.1. The Characteristics of the Internationally Mobile Family .....	8
1.2. Children on the Move: From Leaving to Getting Settled .....	10
2. Schooling the Internationally Mobile Children .....	15
2.1. The Internationally Mobile Parents' Priorities in the Selection of Schools .....	15
2.2. The Role of School in Adjustment of Internationally Mobile Children .....	16
2.3. Supporting and Involving the Internationally Mobile Parents in Schools .....	19
3. Schooling the Internationally Mobile Children in Tartu .....	22
3.1. Methodology .....	22
3.1.1. Sample .....	22
3.1.2. Methods of Data Collection .....	23
3.1.3. The Qualitative Interview as an Instrument of Data Collection .....	23
3.1.4. Procedure .....	24
3.1.5. Ethical Questions .....	25
3.1.6. The Process of Data Analysis .....	26
3.2. Analysing the Internationally Mobile Families' Experiences on Schooling Children in Tartu .....	26
3.2.1. The Family's Preparations for the Move .....	27
3.2.2. The Parents' Priorities in Selecting Schools .....	29
3.2.3. Adjusting in the New School .....	31
3.2.3.1. The Effect of a School's Atmosphere on Adjustment .....	31
3.2.3.2. Academic and Social Adjustment Experiences .....	33
3.2.3.3. Cultural Diversity in Classroom .....	36
3.2.4. The Nature of School Involvement of the Internationally Mobile Parents in Tartu .....	39
3.2.4.1. Home-School Communication .....	39
3.2.4.2. Involvement in Volunteering and Decision-making .....	41
3.2.5. Implications for Schools and Decision-makers .....	44
3.2.5.1. Transition Support .....	44
3.2.5.2. Language Support .....	45

3.2.5.3. Curriculum Concerns .....	46
3.2.5.4. Involving the Internationally Mobile Parents in School:	
From Volunteering to Decision-making .....	47
3.2.5.5. Modelling and Developing International Education in Tartu .....	48
References .....	49

## Introduction

The number of internationally mobile families has increased due to globalisation of industry and education. Transitions are never easy, and have an impact on people who undergo them.

The school-aged children who move internationally are often more influenced by moves than other members of a family. Besides adjustment to a new home, climate and scenery, they have to adjust to a new school, language and find new friends. Schooling experience of any child, internationally mobile or geographically stable, should always be happy and enriching. Thus it is of paramount importance to explore what internationally mobile children experience when moving to a new country, and what expectations do their parents have towards overseas education. This helps to build and develop strategies that support internationally mobile children and their families in transition process.

A number of researches have been conducted in the arena of third culture kids and global nomads. The themes of international education and international schools have emerged from educational needs of internationally mobile children, and have become interdependent. The most recognized authorities in the research arena of internationally mobile children are Barbara Schaetti, Ruth Van Reken and David Pollock. Mary Hayden, Peter MacKenzie and Jeff Thompson are the notable authors of researches and resources on international education and international schools. Debra McLachlan and Rosalyn Ezra have contributed to the field as “researching practitioners” while being teachers at different international schools.

Limitations of the studies in field are connected to the dynamics of an internationally mobile families. The internationally mobile fathers are not easily accessible due to work-related travels. Thus in many cases it's mainly the mothers who form a sample group. For example McLachlan (2007) has pointed it out as a limitation of her study on families in transition. This was not, however, a case of the present research: a half of the respondents there were the fathers

The theme for this study emerged from the author's working experience with internationally mobile families at Tartu International School. Day-to-day school life questions and development of the school suggested need for a closer study on dynamics and educational expectations of internationally mobile families.

Exploring schooling experiences of international families, who live in Estonia on temporary basis, appears to be a relatively unstudied field of research. Until now researches have concentrated on newly arrived immigrants mainly. Dynamics, needs and expectations of

the families, who move to Estonia on temporary bases to work as specialists in business, education or military section, are unique and therefore need a focused study.

The aim of the present master's thesis is to explore the experiences of internationally mobile parents in reference to schooling their children in Tartu.

The following research questions needed to be answered in order to attain the aim of the research:

- What are the expectations of internationally mobile parents towards education in Tartu?
- How did internationally mobile parents help their children to adjust in the new school?
- How did the schools support adjustment of internationally mobile children?
- How did the schools encourage parental involvement of internationally mobile parents?

The master's thesis consists of a theoretical and an empirical part. The theoretical part has two chapters and presents the following themes: the dynamics of an internationally mobile family, transition process of internationally mobile children, parental priorities in the selection of schools, the role of school in children's adjustment, and school involvement of internationally mobile parents. The third chapter is the analysis of the internationally mobile families' experiences in reference to schooling their children in Tartu. In order to get information about the parental experiences six interviews were conducted with internationally mobile parents living and working in Tartu. The interviews were analysed by the principles of qualitative content analysis. Shortcomings and success in adjusting to a new school and parental involvement are described; in addition implications that are based on the empirical study and theoretical resources are suggested for schools and decision-makers.

A limitation of the present research is that the families' period of stay in Tartu was relatively varied. It is a possibility that families' experiences in reference to schooling their children may depend on how long they have lived in the host country. All effort was made, however, to reach the families who had been living in Tartu for a similar period of time.

Hopefully, the present paper will make a contribution to a better understanding of the dynamics of internationally mobile families, and transition and adjustment process of internationally mobile children. It is also hoped that schools and decision-makers use this research for developing the content and format of international education in Tartu and Estonia.

## **1. Families on the Move: The Family Profile and Transition Dynamics**

### **1.1. The Characteristics of the Internationally Mobile Family**

Today, more than 170 million people live, work and study abroad (Helping people abroad, 2010). Recently international relocation has declined due to the global recession. “The volume of international mobility is always subject to rises and falls; for example, we saw a dip in international activity after 9/11.” (Shortland, 2010) The general overall trend, however, remains upward as stated in the 15<sup>th</sup> annual Global Relocation Trends Survey report. 44% of senior-level human resources professionals from a diverse group of industries and countries expect the number of expatriates to increase in 2010 (2010 Global ..., 2010).

Gordon and Jones (undated, cited Hayden 2006) describe three main types of international moves: the “on-off” type of move, usually a fairly short one; the frequent, shortish move commonly associated with diplomatic life, business transfers and international experts; and the longer open-ended or indefinite move of the civil servants (e.g. European Council functionaries).

The families, who experience international moves, are referred as to internationally mobile or nomadic families (McLachlan, 2007). The two commonly used terms have emerged in recent years to describe children of such families: “Global Nomads” and “Third Culture Kids” (Dixon & Hayden, 2008).

A global nomad is a person of any age and nationality, who has lived a significant part of his or her developmental years in one or more countries outside his or her passport country because of parents’ occupation (Schaetti, undated). The term “Third Culture Kid”, abbreviated as TCK, was created by R. H. Useem. He studied experiences of young adult Americans, who had been raised overseas as dependants of professional parents, and returned to the USA to enter university (Langford, 1998). Similarly to global nomads, a third culture kid is an individual, who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years in a culture other than his/her parents’ culture. Third culture kids integrate aspects of their birth culture and the new culture in their host country creating a unique “third culture”. (Pollock, 2004)

The terms “Third Culture Kids” and “Global Nomads” are now being used interchangeably when talking about children who experience international moves due to their parents’ occupation (Langford, 1998; Schaetti, undated). For the purpose of this paper the expression “internationally mobile” will be used in reference to all families and children who experience international moves due to their parent(s) occupation.



There are some characteristics that are typical to internationally mobile families. According to Schaetti (undated), who is a consultant of transition dynamics and a second-generation global nomad herself, a typical internationally mobile family consists of wife, husband and child(ren). In the vast majority of expatriate couples the father's occupation is the reason for the family's move. Only 16% of international expatriate population is being women (Copeland & Meckman, 2002). Citations from the article by Schaetti and Ramsey (1999) humorously describe this fact: "...we will, for simplicity only, use "she" when writing of the non-salaried spouse and "he" when writing of the salaried." The same authors tell further that the question "What does your *father* do?" is one of the first ones that the children typically ask from a newcomer to school. The empirical research for this study confirms the same trend – all but one of the respondent families moved to Tartu due to the father's work.

Typically the fathers of internationally mobile children travel extensively for work, therefore moving to a new country requires the mother "to set aside her own ambitions and attend to her family's most basic needs" (Ramsey & Schaetti, 1999, paragraph 9). Hayden (2006) explains the base of parental involvement of an expatriate mother as follows: "When the mother finds herself in such a situation, the child's school may assume a more central role in her life than would ever have been the case back home". Some schools take an advantage of the large number of mothers who are able to contribute to the school by carrying out some functions there. Being physically present, in return, helps to decrease insecurities of their children (McLachlan, 2007). Results of the surveys described by Langford (1998) suggest that the child's response to relocation is related to that of the mother; and the degree of culture shock experienced by a child is linked to the extent and quality of pre-departure orientation experienced by their mothers.

McLachlan (2007) uses the word "uproot" when talking about how relocating families need to leave behind their friends, family members and other support people from their communities. The family that remains, usually father, mother and the children, are referred to as the ultimate nuclear family (Ramsey & Schaetti, 1999). The members of the nuclear family will need to depend on each other in order to "meet their physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs" (McLachlan, 2007, p. 236). In such situation the family ties usually bind strongly, and create the "family bubble" (Ramsey & Schaetti, 1999).

The support system available for an internationally mobile family in the country of relocation usually involves help from the wage-earner's employment organization, the school(s) the children attend, and the expatriate community. These systems, however, have

limitations: schools usually provide support to the children, and employment organizations can offer little day-to-day support to the whole family (Schaetti, undated).

Strategies that internationally mobile families themselves employ to manage relocation are different. McLachlan (2007) explored transition experiences of 45 internationally mobile families in Southern England. It was found that a key strategy that the families in the study employed, involved restructuring their communication patterns. For example, the traveling fathers were updated on the day-to-day happenings in the lives of the mothers and children.

## **1.2. Children on the Move: From Leaving to Getting Settled**

Little is known about the long-term effects on the children who move internationally. What is known, however, is that moving can be stressful to the children due to change of school, loss of friends and lifestyle (McLachlan, 2008). Moving to another country usually involves separation from the extended family members. Educational needs may separate even direct family members if boarding school becomes necessary; and beloved pets may need to be left behind (Ezra, 2003; Schaetti, 1999). Children, as well as their parents and siblings, face the loss of their familiar surroundings: home, friends, schools, community, language and even the climate. Non-native English speakers may feel anxious and uncomfortable about their limited language proficiency.

Ezra (2003) proposes for a model of concentric circles representing changes faced by internationally mobile children during moves to new countries and subsequent repatriation to their home countries. Schaetti (1996) expresses the view that repatriation to one's home country is typically the most difficult of all transitions. The model is presented in Figure 1 on page 10.

It is a common knowledge that people go through certain transition phases when moving from one location to another. David Pollock, a recognized authority on third culture kids, transitions and internationally mobile families, developed a model for understanding the transition process of children who experience multiple moves (Dixon & Hayden, 2008). Pollock's transition model is frequently used to study the transition experiences of internationally mobile children, because it was especially generated within the context of international schools. For example, Hill and Hayden (2008) studied upper primary school children in an international school in Zürich; and Dixon and Hayden (2008) at Bangkok Patana School, the British international school in Thailand. The results of these studies

suggested that Pollock's transition model does have relevance within the context of international schools (Dixon & Hayden, 2008; Hayden & Hill, 2008).

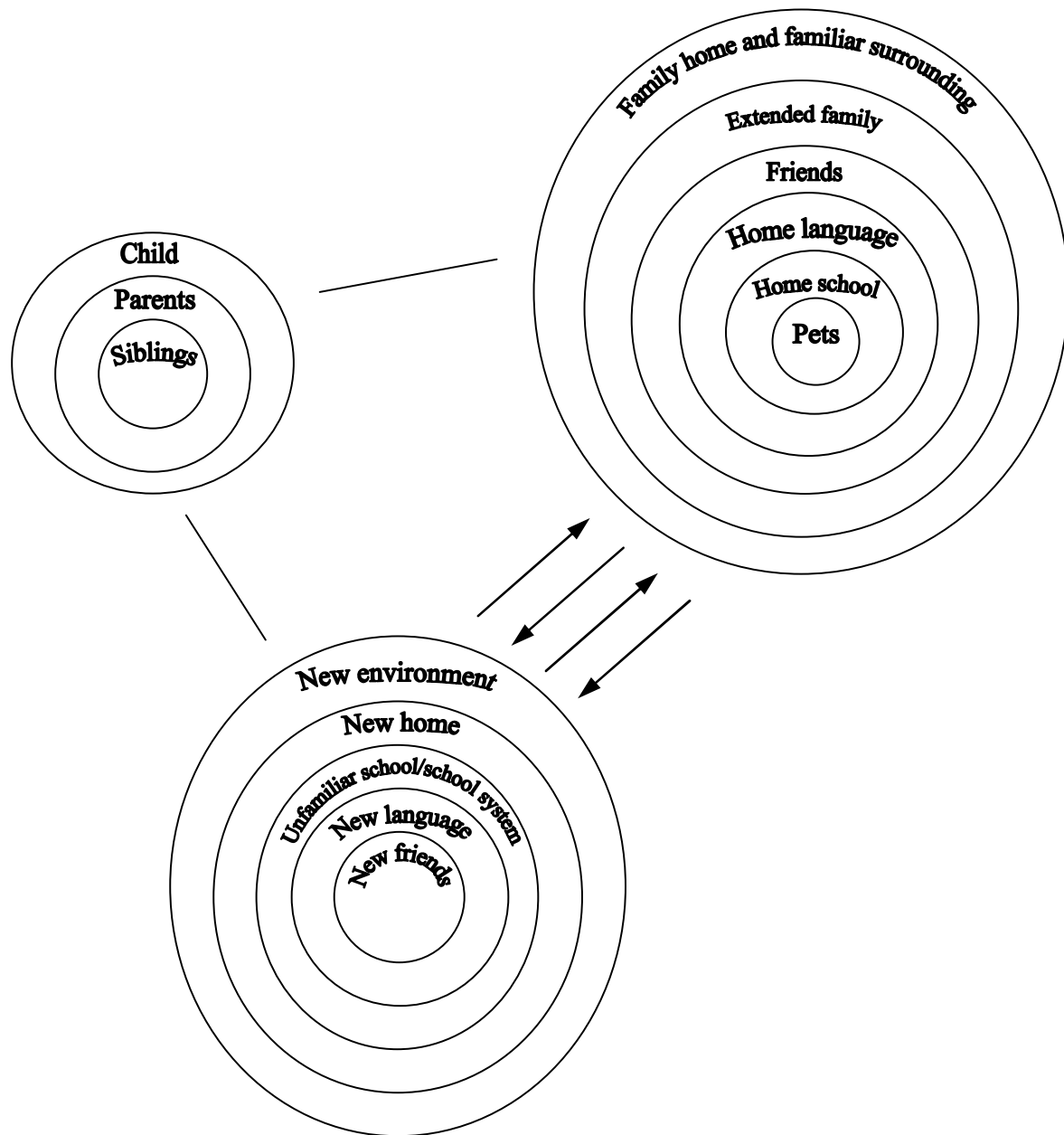


Figure 1. Transitional process of the non-native English speaker (Ezra, 2003)

Figure 2 gives an overview of Pollock's transition phases according to the articles by Schaetti (1996; 1998). It is illustrated with possible thoughts that internationally mobile children may have in each phase. The five stages of this model will be described more closely as follows:

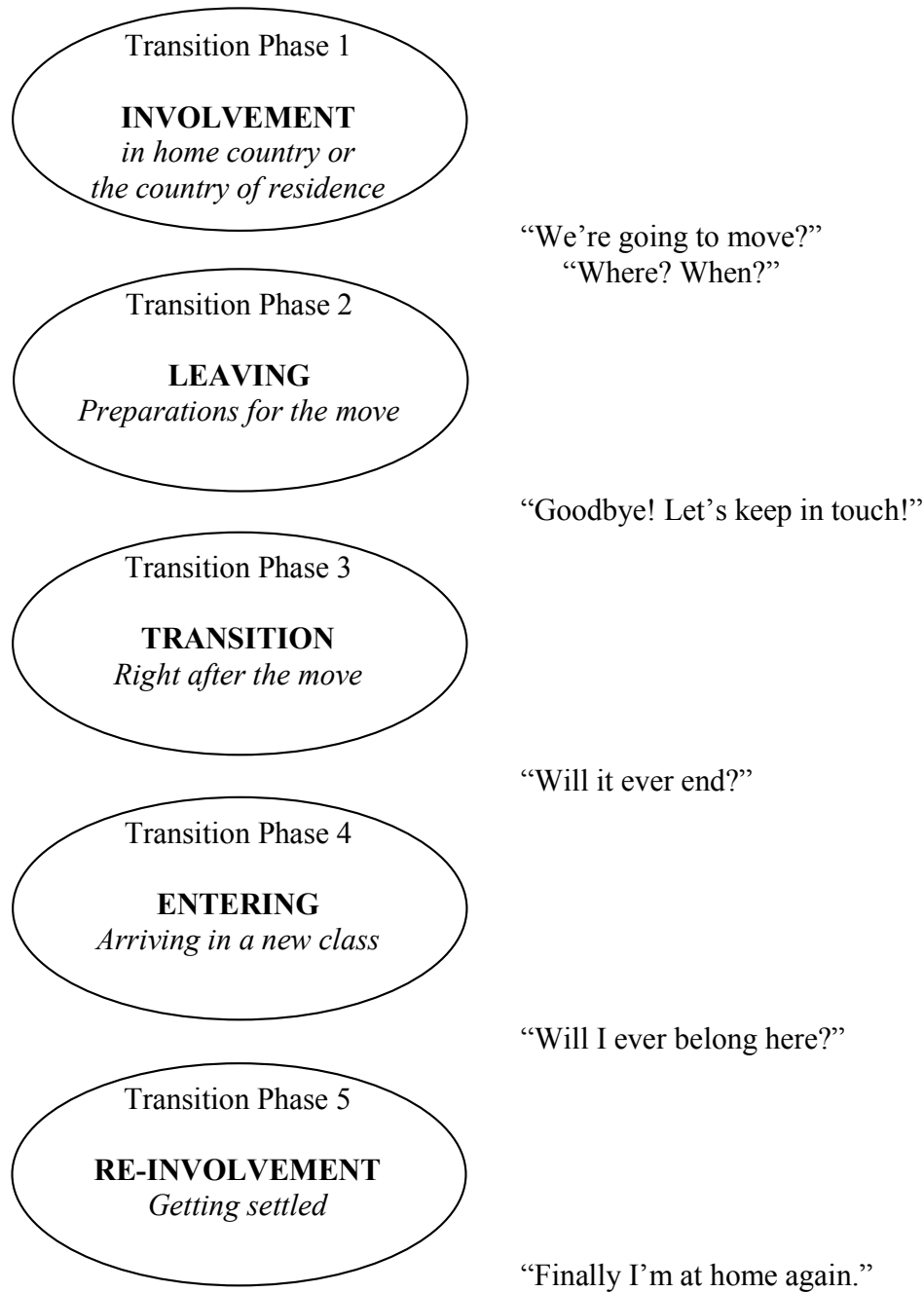


Figure 2. Pollock’s Transition Phases (Aria, 2010; Hayden & Hill, 2008; Schaetti, 1996; 1998)

In the **Involvement** phase people are being involved in their community. They feel secure and confirmed by the world around them in who they are. They are known by others, and know in turn the people as well as community around them. They know where to get their shoes fixed, or where to find specific groceries in a supermarket. Schaetti (1996) stresses that in order to experience involvement a person needs to spend time in a given location. Since

internationally mobile families often move frequently, the children of these families may not have got to the involvement phase at all before a new transfer.

When the decision for the move has been made, the family enters phase 2 – **Leaving**. Typically people in this phase are paid lots of attention by the others – questions where they are going are asked, farewell parties and prior-to-the-move activities with the friends held. In order to leave one must loosen its ties, and so must the ones from whom a child is leaving. Children need to disengage from important people around them, both, when leaving their home country and school, or when leaving a transition country and class. The children who are going through disengagement may create conflicts and rouse anger at school. Attention to leave-taking is one of the most critical intervention points for a school (Schaetti, 1996). Transition activities at school may include educating how to manage feelings of stress, grief and loss, good-bye rituals, and curriculum-based considerations of the destination country.

In the **Transition** phase chaos, isolation, psychological anxiety is felt since one is not only without familiar places and people, but also without own place to stay. Maybe the house is still being renovated, or the household goods have not arrived in yet. The school could educate the students and parents about what Schaetti (1996) calls “sacred objects”. These are the objects that remind children their home and community, wherever he or she may be, and are best to take on an aeroplane, rather than packed in a household shipment.

**Entering** phase is considered the second critical one for school attention. In this phase children are uncertain about their position in a new community, and therefore, vulnerable and easily offended. The school could employ school based family partnership programmes, buddy and mentor systems in this stage to make adjustment smoother. Practical ways to help the students in this phase may include school-wide welcome ritual like induction morning, or updating a world map with colour-coded pins to indicate student nationality(ies) or home countries. In the classroom the children could be encouraged to speak about their home-countries and share their expertise and interests. Internationally mobile children themselves have given a valuable suggestion to newcomers – they should, as quickly as possible, make new friends (Dixon & Hayden, 2008; Hill & Hayden, 2008; Schaetti, 1996). Teachers are invited to support friendship-building process through interactive teaching methods like group work, pair and triad work and student reports to the class.

“The most fortunate of those in transition stay in their new location long enough to finally complete the cycle” (Schaetti, 1996: “Transition Phase 5: Re-Involvement”), or enter the **Re-Involvement** phase. With this phase the children have re-involved themselves again. They know where they belong to, they know community and people around them. They feel safe.

A special kind of transition should be briefly discussed here since this is usually found the most difficult of all transitions. Schaetti (1996) calls this kind of transitions a **Re-Entry**. It means moving to one's passport country, and is considered to be the most challenging of transition phases. Internationally mobile children typically attend a local rather than an international school back in their home countries. International schools are usually more aware of transition dynamics and how the transition process may influence the children, because in national schools student moves are more an exception than a rule.

Every school day about 824,000 students from students from diverse nationalities, linguistic, cultural and religious backgrounds are taught at international schools worldwide (IB fast facts, 2010). Therefore it is of paramount importance for the people who work with internationally mobile children, to learn about the dynamics of globally mobile families and transition, and what impact may relocation have on children on the move.

## **2. Schooling the Internationally Mobile Children**

### **2.1. The Internationally Mobile Parents' Priorities in the Selection of Schools**

Expat Explorer 2009 Survey, which is the largest global study on the opportunities and challenges that internationally mobile families face when living away from home, reports that 31% of the surveyed 3,100 expatriates have dependent children (children under the age of 18) living with them abroad (HSBC Bank International, s.a.). In the today's world where a large amount of children get their education away from their home countries, new principles and forms of education need to be designed and practised. Hayden (2006), a recognised author of books and articles on internationally mobile families and international education, summarizes the tasks of modern education as follows:

Where once the major purpose of education might have been to prepare young people for adult life in the relatively stable society of their childhood, it can no longer be assumed either that a young person will remain within that society or, indeed, that the society will be recognisable as having much in common with that of the child's parents or grandparents. (p. 4)

Finding the most appropriate form of education for their children is one of the main concerns of a family when moving abroad with dependent children. The findings of a study on the expatriate families revealed that after a challenge of learning the local language, the second biggest challenge faced by an expatriate family is how to organize schooling for their children. 34% of the surveyed expatriates rated it difficult and 16% of average difficulty (HSBC Bank International, s.a.).

The forms of education those typically available for internationally mobile children are national or local schools where the language of instruction is the local language, international schools (typically English-speaking), boarding schools and home schooling, which is especially popular with American families but growing among Europeans. The needs of any given family are different – some place a high value on integrating their children into the local community and learning the local language, the others plan to return home after a short period of stay, and want to make sure their children remain the similar format of education.

The vast majority of internationally mobile families choose an international school for their children. Even if "...the term "international school" is not, in itself any guarantee of a particular ethos or philosophy of education" (Hayden, 2006, p. 33), the words "internationally mobile children" and "international school" appear side-by-side in study reports and literature on internationally mobile families (Dixon & Hayden, 2008; Ezra, 2003; Hayden, 2006; Hayden et al., 2003; McLachlan, 2007).

Hayden et al. (2003) give some insight into the factors that militate against children being enrolled in a local national school. These include an unfamiliar language of instruction, concern that the local education system will not provide appropriate preparation for returning home for higher education purposes, and perceived differences in standards between the local and home education systems. The same authors have studied the questions of parental choice and priorities within the context of three international schools in Switzerland, all English-speaking. The study revealed that despite a fact that the parents in the study ranked an English language education of paramount importance, few of them appeared to have **chosen** an international school, far less an “international education” for their children. Most parents simply stated that their careers had taken to a Swiss city where the educational needs of their children had to be met.

Many international schools are “market driven”, as expressed by Richards (as cited in Hayden et al., 2001), and rely on the needs of community they are serving. This means that few of them can afford to adhere to their educational philosophy only; the schools need to find a balance between the educational practices which they believe in and the expectations of the parents (Hayden et al., 2001). Parental priorities in the selection of schools may be influenced by what newly arrived expatriates hear from their compatriots and colleagues. This can lead to “clusters” of children of certain nationalities being found in particular schools (Hayden, 2006).

Whatever type of schooling is chosen for internationally mobile children by their parents: a national or an international school, boarding school or home schooling, the educators should be aware of how frequent moves influence these children and their families. Awareness is a key factor in making adjustment process of internationally mobile children as smooth as possible.

## **2.2.The Role of School in Adjustment of Internationally Mobile Children**

Today the two areas of research: that relating to international education, and that relating to the special qualities of internationally mobile children, have overlapped, or even became interdependent. Schools that serve international communities are unique because of their population of internationally mobile children; the same children develop unique characteristics because of the social and academic environment found at these schools. Teachers and administrators working with internationally mobile children agree that their pupils develop differently from the children who experience domestic stability (Langford,



1998). Thus, the educational needs of internationally mobile children should be addressed differently as well.

Student mobility is characteristic to any school that serves international community. Around 30% of any given student population may turn over every year according to Schaetti (1996) and Haldimann (1998). Indisputably this has an impact on a learning environment: nearly one third of the students have newly arrived and try to deal with uncertainty, whereas one third is anxious about an approaching leave. Such situation in a classroom makes it clear that the schools, which educate internationally mobile children, need to address transitions in order to meet the needs of their student population. Schools do not have the luxury of focusing on academics alone. (Schaetti, 1996; 1998)

Adjustment of internationally mobile children to a new school has many layers: the children need to blend in socially, academically and culturally; as well as manage day-to-day situations like finding their way around a new school house, or remember the names of new classmates.

The results of a survey among teachers and administrators in 41 international schools worldwide revealed the areas where the schools had successfully addressed issues relating to adjustment of internationally mobile pupils. The results suggested that the schools had been successful in orientation of new pupils on arrival, acknowledging the educational needs of internationally mobile pupils, and creating or adopting a curriculum that served global nomads. However, the schools in the study should have been giving a greater attention to some other areas as well. The areas of improvement included: pupil counselling, in-service training for teachers, development of student portfolio that would help to facilitate placement, classroom activities that would support a new student on arrival and departure, parent counselling, and providing the family with practical local information (e.g. doctors, housing). (Langford, 1998)

Academic achievement of a child may drop during adjustment process. Several researchers have described how families, especially non-native English speaking, may be unprepared for the temporary decrease in academic progress due to limited English proficiency (Brown & Sears, 1998 as cited in Ezra, 2003). Ezra (2003), an experienced international school teacher and a researcher, describes that the children, who start their first week in an international school with no English-language knowledge may suffer fatigue, stomach problems, headaches, or other anxiety-related physical symptoms. Children may go through a silent period when they do not feel self-confident enough to speak due to limited language proficiency (Ezra, 2003). This is not, by any means, connected to a student's cognitive ability.

The parents of internationally mobile children may need language support as well. Ezra (2003) advises that translations of the relevant documents should be available, and translators provided if needed for the parents who don't speak the school's language.

International schools worldwide practice a special system called The Optimal Match Concept, which helps to adapt the curricula to each individual student. The concept was originally aimed at students with special needs: English as Second Language (ESL) learners, students with learning disabilities and/or exceptionally high abilities and talents. Since majority of the children in international schools are ESL learners, this concept is applied to nearly all student population of an international school. Student learning styles and profiles are diverse. "This calls for adapting the curricula to the student rather than the student being instructed to a fixed curricula." (Haldimann, 1998, p. 141) The Optimal Match Concept is rather a philosophy than it is a ready-made tool. Schools in the European Council of International Schools accreditation process are expected to formulate a model how to fine-tune their curricula so that it would match any individual student's demonstrated level and ideal pace of learning (Haldimann, 1998). Optimal Match practices at different international schools reflect the following key themes: collaboration, commitment and communication between all people involved in a child's education.

In order to support their students Schaetti (1998) invites the schools that serve the international communities to develop a body that she calls a "transitions resource team". Transitions resource teams could consist of 7–10 of committed teachers, administrators, counsellors, and sometimes parents and students. The teams could develop in-house expertise on student transition matters, provide assistance to the families and staff and encourage and support transition activities. In addition there's much that the teacher can do in the classroom, such as talking about the children's native or past host countries, using interactive learning exercises or including transition and adjustment topics in personal and social education programme.

Transition programming in schools that educate internationally mobile children is becoming an accepted norm, "the parents are beginning to expect it" as noted by Schaetti (1996, p. 7). The schools that cater for globally mobile children are often dependent on the expatriate community for their enrolments, and should therefore continuously assess the quality of programmes they deliver (Schaetti, 1998).

### **2.3. Supporting and Involving the Internationally Mobile Parents in Schools**

Parent support and involvement plays a significant role in the students' academic achievement, and promotes positive student attitudes and behavior (Abouchaar & Desforges, 2003; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Ferrera (2009) presents the results of a recent study among school staff, parents, administrators and pre-service teachers in the US. She explored how parent involvement is perceived by educators. Majority of the positive comments from the teachers expressed the view that parent involvement is "the most important factor in creating their child's academic, social and emotional success in school and life" (Ferrera, 2009, p. 136).

Epstein (undated) an American researcher, who has worked with schools, homes and communities to develop research-based partnership programmes, has developed a framework for defining six types of parent involvement: parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaboration with the community. Schools can improve different types of parent involvement through various practices. Table 1 on page 19 presents definitions of Epstein's six types of parent involvement and gives example practices for schools.

Parents and parent involvement have been the topics of various researches in general. Relatively little, however, has so far been written about the parents of the internationally mobile children (Hayden, 2006). Some international schools see supporting internationally mobile children alone inadequate and try to find ways how to support the whole family (McLachlan, 2008). They provide different types of counselling and other forms of parental support. For example encouraging parents' involvement in parent committees and parent-teacher associations, or providing a parents' room at school where the mothers and fathers can informally meet during the day for social contact. Overall, international schools seem to have a deeper understanding about the importance of encouraging and supporting parental involvement. Indeed, many of them have taken themselves more roles and responsibilities than would ever be expected from a school in a national system. (Hayden, 2006)

Table 1. Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Parent Involvement (Epstein, undated)

Type of Involvement	Definition	Sample Practices
Parenting	Help all families establish home environments to support children as students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suggestions for home conditions that support learning;</li> <li>• parent courses</li> </ul>
Communication	Design effective forms of home-school and school-home communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent-teacher conferences;</li> <li>• report cards;</li> <li>• clear information on all school policies; language translators to assist families as needed</li> </ul>
Volunteering	Recruit and organize parent help and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School and classroom volunteer programme;</li> <li>• parent room or family centre</li> </ul>
Learning at home	Assist parents how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities (e.g. decisions, planning)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information for families on skills required for students in all subjects;</li> <li>• information on homework policies</li> </ul>
Decision making	Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Membership of school board, advisory councils or committees;</li> <li>• information on board member election procedure</li> </ul>
Collaborating with community	Involve community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information on community programmes and services (e.g. health, cultural);</li> <li>• service to the community by the students, families and schools (e.g. recycling at school;</li> <li>• students performance at community events)</li> </ul>

Parental involvement in school is not a universal expectation (Copeland, 2007). Diverse cultural backgrounds of internationally mobile parents need to be kept in mind when involving parents in school. Table 2 below (page 20) describes how much school involvement is expected from parents in different countries.<sup>1</sup>

Information in table 2 above suggests that parents from diverse ethnic background may be used to different expectations from schools in reference to parental involvement. For instance, the parents from Italy would probably not as actively volunteer to accompany a school trip as do the parents from New Zealand, who would probably be very surprised if they weren't asked.

<sup>1</sup> The idea for using TIMSS 2007 report to create this table is derived from Copeland (2007).

Table 2. Schools' Expectations towards Parent Involvement in Different Countries  
(Mullis et al., 2008)

Country	Percentages of Students whose Schools Reported that they Ask Parents to be Involved in the School-related Activity				
	Attend special events (e.g. concert, sporting Events)	Raise funds for the school	Volunteer for school projects, programmes, trips	Ensure that their child completes his/her homework	Serve on school committees
Austria	91	56	98	93	100
England	100	98	93	99	84
Italy	99	37	51	96	51
Japan	98	2	92	87	23
Latvia	97	48	81	82	71
New Zealand	100	96	100	94	94
Russian Federation	99	67	96	99	91
Slovak Republic	57	66	83	91	82
Sweden	91	3	86	99	65
United States	100	94	98	100	89

Diverse cultural backgrounds of the parents may play role in involvement of in their children's academic matters. Walker (2000, as cited in Ezra, 2003) describes how Japanese and Scandinavian parents may give different responses when they are faced with their child's lack of academic achievement at school. In Japan high academic achievement is associated with future acceptance into a prestigious university that guarantees a high-paying work position. This puts tremendous pressure for academic success on the family. It is more likely that the Scandinavians take a relaxed and patient view towards slow academic progress of their child, as a result, there would be less cultural stress placed on the family. Of course, these cultural generalizations are not confirmed by all parents.

According to Cadden and Kittell (undated, paragraph 6) relocating parents "worry about their children adjusting to their new school, falling behind academically because of the move, or having to say goodbye to new friends that they have only just gotten to know". Schools can do a lot to support internationally mobile families and according to Schaetti in Langford (1998: 38) they have a key role to play there: "The schools have ... a pivotal role to play. They can influence the child's arrival, influence the child's departure, they influence the child's arrival in the next location."

Therefore, for schools that cater for international community, acknowledging their role in lives of their students is of paramount importance. Appreciation of this role is a base for developing an educational concept that would meet the needs of globally mobile children and their families.

### 3. Schooling the Internationally Mobile Children in Tartu

#### 3.1. Methodology

##### 3.1.1. Sample

The sample consists of six parents of internationally mobile children – three fathers and three mothers whose children go to basic school<sup>2</sup> in Tartu from Denmark, Finland, Germany, Israel and the United States of America.

The reason why the families had moved to Tartu was the father's work, and in one case it was the father's study. The working fathers were employed as experts in education and business in Tartu. Their spouses, with one exception were not working; they were completely engaged in taking care of their families and in one case also home schooling. Moving to Tartu was the first international move for five families, while for one it was the second. Nearly all interviewees had previously experienced domestic or international relocation without their family due to work, study or immigration.

At the time of interview the children of the interviewees had the experience of going to school in Tartu from 6 months to 3.5 academic years, the families having lived in Tartu between 6 months and 5 years. In the original criteria for the sample the researcher had indicated the period of schooling from 1 to 3 academic years; but it soon it became clear that the number of internationally mobile families that would qualify for this and other criteria was limited. Therefore, the period of the schooling experience was widened.

The families who participated in the research have 11 school-aged children, they go to three different schools in Tartu. Four of them are in the first stage of basic school (years 1 to 3), three in the second (years 4 to 6) and two in the third (years 7 to 9).

Altogether twelve internationally mobile families received a request for a research interview, and it was the family's decision who was interviewed – the mother or the father. The interviewees have given their oral permission to refer to the names of their home countries in this research report. I believe that this data would support and illustrate my research report and will give the reader an insight into the ethnic diversity of the internationally mobile families whose children go to the basic school in Tartu. I express my sincere thanks to the interviewees and their families.

---

<sup>2</sup> School type in Estonia that offers basic education to grade levels 1 to 9 (ages 7 to 15).

### 3.1.2. Methods of Data Collection

Empirical qualitative research was conducted for this study. The data for the research was collected through interviews. Since the aim of the research was to learn about a schooling experience of internationally mobile families living in Tartu, it was strongly felt that the most valuable data could be acquired by talking to these families, not asking them to fill in a questionnaire, or as noted by Rubin and Rubin (1995): not to reduce people's experiences to numbers.

When outlining the research I had doubts as to the sample of this research was big enough to answer my research question. I was soon convinced by Kvale (1996) who has used this dilemma to suggest the advantages of qualitative research: a common criticism of interview studies is that the findings cannot be generalized because there are too few subjects. He further argues this case by stating that if the aim of a study is to obtain general knowledge, then one should focus on a few intensive case studies. The same author also indicates that in current interview studies the number of interviewees is about  $15 \pm 10$ .

The intention of this research is to raise the awareness of the local community and authorities about schooling needs and expectations of internationally mobile families. Qualitative interviewing is especially suitable for this type of study as it is a particularly good method for eliciting comment on and a description of social and political processes. Decision makers can use the results of qualitative interviewing studies to shed new light on old problems. (Rubin & Rubin, 1995)

### 3.1.3. The Qualitative Interview as an Instrument of Data Collection

Six qualitative interviews were conducted to collect data for the current research. The interview form used was a semi-structured interview, with a purpose to obtain descriptions of the life world of an interviewee (Kvale, 1996).

The interviews with the internationally mobile parents followed the principles of the responsive interviewing model described by Rubin and Rubin (1995). In responsive interviewing the researcher needs to find a balance between being responsive to the interviewees while not losing the main focus of the research.

A set of questions was prepared for the interviews. The questions were derived from the aims of the research, and from theoretical resources on internationally mobile families. The interview questions were structured into four units. Each block included 1–3 main questions

and 3–6 follow-up questions. Though there are no fixed rules, experienced researchers rarely prepare more than half a dozen questions, and of those, expect to actually ask only 3 or 4. (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) As a novice researcher, my list clearly included too many questions at first. After the pilot interview had been conducted, several questions were rephrased to make them more clear and less formal, or they were omitted as being irrelevant to the study (e.g. Were your child's classmates involved in his/her adjustment process?).

The list of prepared questions was followed in all interviews. The questions were, however, rephrased or asked in a different order depending on the pace of the interview and the responses of the interviewee. As the interviews progressed my confidence increased as an interviewer – the prepared questions became more of a guideline rather than a tick list. Asking everyone the same questions makes little sense in qualitative interviewing. An interview is a window on a time and a social world that is experienced one person at a time, one incident at a time. (Rubin & Rubin, 1995)

#### 3.1.4. Procedure

The interview requests were made in two ways: a) personally from the beginning, in the event that I had the family's contact details because of our earlier non-research-related connection, or b) through the children's schools. I approached the five schools where I knew the internationally mobile children now learn – municipal or private, Estonian- or English-speaking. The schools were asked to forward interview requests to the families who, if they were interested, permitted me to contact them. One parent out of the six was recruited through another interviewee. All interview requests were sent by e-mail. The e-mail also included a brief explanation of the research aims and the interview procedure. All interview locations and times were selected by the interviewees at their convenience.

Before the interview phase started the Interview Guide, which helped establish some common principles, was composed by the researcher. Besides the Sample Criteria and the Recruitment Principles the Interview Guide includes the following sections: the Interview Procedure, Transcription, Coding and Confidentiality. The first draft of the Interview Guide was edited after conducting and transcribing the pilot interview. The interviews lasted from 45 to 80 minutes, and were all recorded with a dictaphone. Each interview started and ended with a 5-minute briefing. The researcher's reflections on the interview situation and emotional response were collected in the Research Log at the first opportunity.



The interviews were transcribed as soon as possible by the researcher. It was planned to transcribe the interviews verbatim but after conducting and transcribing the pilot interview I decided to leave out frequent repetitions of the words and phrases that are natural in oral speech, but were not relevant to the context and did not affect the meaning of what the interviewee was saying. Pauses, emphasis in intonation, and emotional expressions like laughter and sighing are, however, included in the transcriptions. The last interview, that was conducted when the process of analysis had already started, was not fully transcribed. Some parts in it that are not relevant to the research question are condensed and summarized.

For the purpose of quoting the interviewees some grammatical errors were corrected while transcribing the interviews; this did not change the content. One of the interviewees wished to see the transcription of the interview; two were interested in seeing the final research report.

Several authors indicate that qualitative interviews are conversations between the interviewee and the interviewer (Kvale, 1996; Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Witzel, 2000). Since I share this understanding my research interviews were also conducted in the manner of a guided conversation; however, as an interviewer it was needed to bear in mind that my conversation partners were likely to have diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

In different cultures different norms may hold for interactions with strangers concerning initiative, directness, openness etc (Kvale, 1996). In a large qualitative interview study about immigrant involvement in society the researchers noticed that in certain cases the transcription of the interviews suggested that issues of cultural politeness prevented the interviewer from probing or posing follow-up questions (Vogel, 2008). In one of the interviews I was aware of this trend when asking questions on some topics.

### 3.1.5. Ethical Questions

At the start of the interview research a parallel ethical protocol was drafted as suggested by Kvale (1996). This helped me to think through and anticipate any ethical issues in the research. The interviewees were informed about the aims and possible outcomes of the research in written in e-mails, and orally at the beginning of the interview. The parents confirmed their participation in the research through e-mail, and gave their oral informed consent and permission before the interview started.

The interviewees were aware that full protection of their confidentiality may be complicated in the context of Tartu where the population of internationally mobile families is relatively small; however, all possible measures to avoid identification were taken by the

researcher. The interviewees' home countries or any other personal data will not be referred to in quotations in order to counteract over-identification, instead the codes *Parent 1*, *Parent 2* etc. are used to attribute the quotes.

### 3.1.6. The Process of Data Analysis

The collected data was analysed by the principles of qualitative content analysis. Qualitative content analysis focuses on the features of the language and texts within their context of communication (Laherand, 2008).

Deductive approach to content analysis was applied to code the data. Kvale (1996, p. 195) stresses the importance of open mindedness of the researcher in this phase: "The researcher here attempts to read the subject's answers without prejudice and to thematize the statements from her viewpoint as understood by the researcher". The categories: the family's reasons and preparations for the move, criteria for choosing schools, adjusting in the new school, parental involvement, and suggestions from the parents, were derived from the research questions and from the theoretical material. However, the researcher immersed herself in the data and allowed new themes emerge from it. Data was re-organised whenever relevant throughout the analysis process.

Firstly each transcribed interview was printed out and read through to get a sense of the whole. Then an interview was coded – meaning units that matched with the categories were determined. The process of analysis continued on a computer – the meaning units in an interview were collected under the same category. Each interview was analysed individually, after which data from all interviews was sorted and conjoined together into a single computer file.

The empirical data is analysed against the theoretical part of this study. Analysis of the suggestions made by the parents is based on the experiences of the mothers and fathers in the study.

## 3.2. Analysing the Internationally Mobile Families' Experiences on Schooling Children in Tartu

Three themes emerged from the interview analysis: the family's preparations for the move, adjusting to the new school, and parent involvement. The parents' suggestions to schools and decision-makers on educating internationally mobile children are collected together under the heading "Implications for Schools and Decision-Makers".

The data analysis is composed as a timeline that describes the families' experiences from the preparations for the move until the time of the interview.

### 3.2.1. The Family's Preparations for the Move

Relocating families often face hard personal and career choices when considering international relocation: the number of families who decline global posts because of concerns over family adjustment has increased significantly since 1995 (Cadden & Kittell, undated).

Parental attitudes towards the move may have a significant impact on how their children feel about moving to another country. A father in the study said that he had been worried about the move, but knowing that they could always return to their home country seemed to have helped to maintain a relaxed and balanced view of relocation. *But you need to try you will never know until you start doing something. So we knew that we always have an option to go back any time.* (Parent 3) The internationally mobile parents in the study expressed that it was relatively easy for their families to make a decision about the move to Tartu. One parent said that he had heard only good things about Tartu: *...there were only positive factors and no negative factors, so the decision was quite easy.* (Parent 5); and the other expressed that there were no doubts about moving: *...we just go!*

The pragmatic reason for moving to Tartu was primarily the fathers' job; some interviewees, however, described also somewhat idealistic aspects, such as they were hoping to experience living abroad as a family, or that they wanted their children to get a cultural experience: *...for my son, I think, he's probably the most winning party of it all...from the cultural perspective and in overall – he's getting like broad, very broad perspective on how other people live, what are the other traditions et cetera....* (Parent 3)

It was not the aim of this research to study how the parents prepared their children for the move; this important theme emerged from the parents' responses. The internationally mobile parents in the study employed several strategies to help their children to get prepared for the move to Tartu. One of the major ones was to gather as much information as possible to share with their children about their new home and school in Tartu. In order to do so the parents searched the Internet, contacted same nationality families in Tartu, consulted their colleagues at work, or other people that they knew. Nearly all the families visited the school and talked to the head teacher and teachers before making the final decision. One mother described how she and her husband had paid a preparatory visit in order to find a house and tour the school. If paying a visit was impossible, questions were asked over the phone. Other families

prepared their children by arriving in Tartu early before the school year started, so that the children had some time to acclimatize to the new environment.

Only a small number of parents said that they gathered useful information from the schools' home page. Regretfully, the vast majority of schools in Tartu do not provide information in English in their home pages. This is essential, however, as searching the Internet was the most common way of learning about schooling opportunities in Tartu among the parents in the study.

The interviews suggested that the prior-to-the-move activities of the families had paid themselves off since the most of the parents reported that they had felt comfortable to decide in which school to enrol their children with information they had at that time. Some parents, however, told they had been *worried* or *nervous*. Unknown may cause worries and anxiety. These parents may have felt uncomfortable because either they did not have enough information about the schools and programmes, or they were not fully convinced and comfortable that the schools they had chosen meets the educational needs of their children.

Moving to another country can be stressful or even a traumatic experience to any child. This is especially the case, when the language spoken in the new country, is not the same as the child's native language. Nearly all of the children, whose parents were interviewed for the study, were enrolled in schools and followed programmes taught in a language different from the language that they speak at home. Parents attempted to ease possible language-based challenges prior to the move, and were creative in introducing the new language to their children, as suggested by the example below.

*I was thinking a lot about that – well whatever I can do to help my son to pick up the language I will do it because it makes the life easier for him. ...And that was the reason why we had all those rules about that at kindergarten we speak English, at lunch we speak English.* (Parent 1)

One language-learning strategy described by the parents was intensive private tutoring. In another case the child stayed in the Estonian-speaking kindergarten in Tartu a year longer before school in order to gain more language proficiency. A father of two children at school in Tartu expressed his thoughts as follows: *...I think if we would have known in advance we're going to be here for whole year, we probably would have come a little bit early, like a month early, and put them on an intensive language programme early.* (Parent 6)

The schools for internationally mobile children should support the parents in the preparations for the move and offer a pre-transfer programme. Making contact with new school at the earliest opportunity is vital when preparing children for the move. A study

among the children at Bangkok Patana School, which is a British international school in Thailand, revealed that only a small number of 30 children in the study felt that the school knew what sort of person they were before they joined. (Dixon & Hayden, 2008) Modern communication technology could facilitate contacts between children and teachers, and provide useful advance information for both sides. It should be kept in mind, however, that information that the school provides to the families about new teachers, classmates and the programme, should be aimed as well as at the child, and not only at parents.

### 3.2.2. The Parents' Priorities in Selecting Schools

Concern for their child's education is, in most cases, a relocating employee's chief worry and a key reason for turning down an international assignment (Cadden & Kittell, undated). One mother in the study explained her feelings as follows: *But I would say that moving to another country when you have kids, the most difficult thing there is, is how you're going to educate your kids.* (Parent 2)

The interviews with the internationally mobile parents revealed the same trend: the main concern of the parents in the study was how the educational needs of their children will be met in Tartu. The majority of the parents expressed the view that it was somewhat a pre-condition to accept the working position and move to Tartu. *...So the only reason we could accept this offer is because we found a set up for education.* (Parent 3)

The parents in the study described different educational programmes that their children followed in Tartu. Their children went to: a) the local English-speaking international school, b) an Estonian-speaking municipal school with full Estonian curriculum, c) an Estonian-speaking municipal school, where the programme was taught in Estonian and English, or d) followed a home schooling programme combined with a tutor and an Estonian-speaking municipal school, where the programme was taught in Estonian and English.

The parental priorities in the selection of schools in Tartu, varied. For some, the possibility to enrol their children an English-speaking international school was, according to one parent, almost a pre-condition for the move: *If we didn't have this school we couldn't move. So we wouldn't be staying here.* (Parent 3)

Another parent stated: *If there had not been an international school opportunity for my son, then we would have said no to the position to come.* (Parent 1)

These parents saw the English-speaking environment of the international school as an advantage in many ways. They believed that in an English-speaking environment English

might be learnt more quickly and easily, and the knowledge of English would be useful for the child in future. *Because in [our home country] there're so few people who speak Estonian [laughs]. So if we should have any advantage of learning some new language skills, English was a huge plus for him in the future. So that was the main reason.* (Parent 1)

Another important reason for choosing an English-speaking school was that the common language would make it possible for the parents to communicate with the staff, and help with homework. In addition the parents expressed that English-speaking school simply makes more sense if the children had some English language proficiency already. However, the number of the respondents was relatively small, the data analysis suggested that the children who were enrolled in a fully English-speaking had had smoother adjustments. Having a common language to communicate with the teachers may have helped the parents to be more involved in the school, and thus the children's adjustment was easier.

The two parents, whose children went to an Estonian-speaking municipal school and followed an all-in-Estonian programme, felt that they had made a judicious decision about their school choice. In the one case the child had gained good Estonian language skills already and her friends started in the same school and class. The other parent felt that local Estonian school better matched the family's educational requirements.

For one family, however, it was not easy to meet the educational needs of their children in Tartu. One mother described how she had put a lot of effort into working out an appropriate solution, which combined home schooling with the mother, private tutoring in the children's native language on school premises, and some elements from the programme that the school was offering. *So we're pretty much using the school facilities,* concluded the parent.

The children of the parents in the study attended three different schools in Tartu. However the educational needs and intentions of each family were different, the interviews with internationally mobile parents in Tartu suggested, that the location or organisational framework in which education was provided, was not of paramount importance. One of the fathers suggested that Tartu could develop a focused programme for internationally mobile students: *Maybe there should be one central school that takes the international students, because if you have let's say 5 different schools, in each one of them 1 or 2 or 3 students... It makes it very difficult for each of these 5 schools to do. But if you had one school, you had 12 or 15 students maybe you can have a whole programme. ... But you need to educate the people around here also. The companies, they need to know that there's a focused programme at one school.* (Parent 6)

The interviews with internationally mobile parents confirmed that finding a school, that meets the family's educational requirements, was a key factor influencing their move to Tartu. It is welcoming that today there are schools in Tartu that offer programmes for internationally mobile children. Overall, the parents' answers suggested that nearly all of them had managed to find, or organise, a type of schooling that they and their children were happy with. It had demanded, however, a lot of effort from the parents in some cases.

### 3.2.3. Adjusting in the New School

Arriving in a new school and class may be a relatively anxiety-causing phase for an internationally mobile child and support from school is critical there (Dixon & Hayden, 2008; Hill & Hayden, 2008; McLachlan, 2007; Schaetti, 1996). The next paragraphs present what the internationally mobile parents in the study experienced about their children's adjustment to new schools in Tartu.

#### 3.2.3.1. *The Effect of a School's Atmosphere on Adjustment*

Adjustment support strategies at school may involve various activities such as induction days and welcome rituals, but probably the most effective support in the entry phase is a spontaneous or unconscious welcome, something that is palpable in the school's atmosphere. Malpass (s.a. cited in Langford, 1998) describes the role of the school catering for internationally mobile children:

The best thing a school can do is to provide as secure, welcoming environment for all its children. It can't protect them totally from these things [adversity and challenges] in life. In the end these things build character and all the changes develop character. As long as the school is warm and welcoming and supportive in all its ways, the children will, for the most part, be okay. (p. 39)

Children in transition experience several losses and face a number of challenges due to relocation to a new country. It is the school that plays a significant role in making transition as smooth and happy as possible. The parents in the study used the expressions: *quiet, informal, intimate, safe, comfortable, happy, friendly, relaxed* when talking about the school environment. This may indicate that the schools in Tartu, where the children of the parents in the study go to, have managed to create a supportive environment for their internationally mobile pupils. The mothers and fathers in the study illustrated this suggestion with their experiences. One father described how his son had arrived in his new school: ...*the first*

*concern was how the other children will accept him. This is always a question when newcomers join in. ...When we came the kids were actually looking outside out of the windows and trying to see where's the new boy coming? [laughs] So it was very impressive for him, they were waiting for him to come. Which was also good, which was already very good first impression. (Parent 3)*

One mother believed that the school where her son went to was *a very positive way for the small child to start school*. She explained further: *... To start in the small group, in the small quiet environment compared to move to the foreign country and to start up with the new language, the new social and cultural environment in a big school. It was for me very important that it was very comfortable. (Parent 1)*

Adjustment of the children cannot be separated from how their parents feel about school. If the parents feel welcome so do the children. The school's atmosphere of the school plays a significant role here. For this study the parents were asked if they felt welcome at school; happily, most of the responses were very positive there: *I'm totally comfortable there ... it's a very easy place to visit. (Parent 5)*

*I like to come and feel the spirit and so on ... I feel that I'm always welcome when I arrive there. (Parent 1)*

The parents in the study gave more examples when asked what had the school done in order to support their children's adjustment. *...when they first came the teachers were nice, they introduced them to all the students. (Parent 2)*

*...The way that they are doing it is that they are [the people at school] helping whenever it's needed, you can always come and ask for help if it's needed. (Parent 1)*

A new school's premises can be as confusing as any other new place. Where's the Maths classroom? or how to find the way to the gym? – these may be the questions that a new child at a big school often needs to deal with. A mother, whose children go to a relatively big school in Tartu, said how she had missed home-rooms for her children, and suggested that it may have made a difference to the adjustment process. *Even if they [internationally mobile children] didn't have every class in that one place but maybe in the break they could sit down and talk to each other. I think it's just important for them to have liked some kind of an anchor ... some place where they could feel they can relate to each other and come back to a base. That would probably be helpful. (Parent 2)*

The thoughts of this mother are supported by Schaetti (1996), who suggests that a “home room” lesson which children regularly attend may help to facilitate student transitions into the school community. Transition and adjustment dynamics of internationally mobile children are



unique. Therefore, providing a home room, or setting up “home room” lessons to internationally mobile children is especially important if they are going to the same school and class with Estonian-speaking students, which is a case of some schools in Tartu.

### 3.2.3.2. *Academic and Social Adjustment Experiences*

The academic and social adjustment experiences of the children were variously described by the parents. These two themes were discussed side-by-side, because they are, as expressed by one mother, closely linked and cannot be separated.

The interviews suggested that how the children adjust academically and socially may depend on parental expectations of education. Some parents expressed that social and cultural adjustment was of primary importance for them. For example one of the fathers in the study expressed that the move to Tartu was *just going to be more of a cultural experience and less an educational*. (Parent 6)

Academic achievement of children is a theme that often concerns all mothers and fathers globally. It has been stated that 84% of internationally mobile parents are not convinced that their children will be able to achieve the same level of education excellence overseas as they would at home (Cadden & Kittell, undated). Similar concern may have been a case of one parent in the study. Academic achievement was of paramount importance for this parent, and he stressed it as follows: *...when they go back to [home country] they have to [stressed by the parent] be able to go right back to their appropriate grade and they can't miss anything*. (Parent 2)

The parents' expectations towards education are different. However, both educators and parents of the children who experience international moves need to keep in mind that relocation may decrease the children's academic performance. The parents' responses suggested that it was easier to adjust to a new school for these children whose parents' expectations towards academics were more relaxed.

Another somewhat sensitive issue about academics is whether, and to what extent should a school that caters for internationally mobile community integrate students' national curriculum into the school's curriculum. The parents in the study expressed diverse views on this question. Some of them expected, to some extent, the new school to follow the national curriculum and the learning materials of the child's home country, whereas the others were satisfied with the programme that their children were following in their new schools. Integrating requirements of various national curricula in the host school's programme is

challenging in practice; and from more an idealistic view it may not support providing **international** education to globally mobile children.

In most cases the parents in the study supported their children in learning specific national curriculum topics at home. For example several parents had decided that their children would work, to some extent, on reading and writing in their mother. One mother, however, described how her son had mixed the sounds of the three different languages: his mother tongue, English and Estonian – the language that was taught at school; this had made him feel so frustrated. She believed that her son would easily pick up his mother tongue spelling later on, since this is a part of his cultural environment at home. The mother commented on her subsequent action as follows: *We waited until he started in the second grade to pick up the national homework. And that is the best decision I made because it took away lot of those frustrations that he had about mixing the languages and the letters.* (Parent 1)

The majority of the parents were pleased with the level of academic education that the schools in Tartu provided. *We are very happy about the school, and also the education system.* (Parent 4)

*Well, I think that for my son these have been some wonderful years here. He's learned a lot, I'm quite amazed of what he has learned during these years. ... I do think that in some topics he is ahead in front of his mates in [our home country].* (Parent1)

*And I'm so [stressed by a parent] happy with the maths my kids do at school.* (Parent 2)

*... in terms of my son's advancement, it is important that he advances at least as fast as in home country because he was always one of the leading students in his class, always. And what was important to us is to make sure that he continues this fast. And actually here we have, I think, even better options ... So I think he's getting what we want him to get.* (Parent 3)

Social adjustment, however, turned out to be a theme that revealed some worrying issues. It may be challenging for a child to make new friends at a new school. An interview with one parent suggested that the efforts that the parents and the school had made in order to help the children with the socialization process, did not work out in their case. Not knowing the common language might have been a major reason there. This mother describes how she tried to get her child to gymnastics training. It was not working out, however, because nobody could talk to her daughter. The same mother described how her children felt in some of the lessons that were taught in a foreign language to them:

*There were a few other classes that I also felt that they were just wasting their time because nobody was talking to them, and they were not allowed to talk cause you're at class, so there was no socialization and they were just sitting there wasting their time.* (Parent 2)

Ezra (2003, p. 131) tells that “peer group acceptance is a major factor in the acculturation of the child into the school environment”. Similarly, a father in the study expressed the belief that for his daughter adjustment period was measured by how quickly she could become assimilated into a peer group of teenage girls. *For her though it was like that [finger snapping]. Immediately, like first day of school, she had friends. I mean like immediately she’s hanging out with friends at school, they’re going to the movies, she was going to the birthday parties, she was, you know, whatever, doing all the things.* (Parent 6)

An important question, that may affect both academic and social adjustment, is whether the school is able to find an appropriate learning programme for the child. Eliciting prior knowledge from an internationally mobile child can be rather a challenging task because in many cases the language of instruction at the new school is different from what is spoken at home and at the old school; in addition the scope of curricula vary from country to country.

According to the parents in the study the schools in Tartu employed several strategies to find the most appropriate programme for the internationally mobile children: the results from previous schools were considered, the schools ran tests or observed the children and developed personal educational programmes. The question regarding each child’s appropriate entry level: in some a child was placed in a year level that followed the school’s system, and was applied to all students; in others a child started in a year level that matched with the system in his/her home country. Parents’ experiences about getting the programme right differ. A father in the study said: *This hasn’t been a issue of any discussion, so I think in back there [at school] they somehow solved the issue* (Parent 5), whereas one of the mothers thoughtfully described her experience: *...they could not find the right classes for him. It would just ..., it just wasn’t going to work out. Each class that he was put in to was either too high or too low, or he didn’t understand.* (Parent 2)

The interviews suggested that flexibility from the schools may have helped the children with academic adjustment. The parents said that the schools were flexible in terms of timetable, syllabi, and learning materials, and that the parents could pull their children out of the classes, which did not work out for them.

Social adjustment and academic achievement are the themes that are closely connected. Children, who are not socially adjusted to a new environment cannot achieve academically. It is believed that the level of the child’s social skills is directly related to how easily he/she is accepted in a new environment. (Ezra, 2003) Not surprisingly nearly all transition programming activities for internationally mobile children are aimed at supporting their social adjustment and developing interpersonal skills. Schools that educate internationally mobile

students have a challenging task to find a balance between social and academic education. Schools should address parents of internationally mobile children the topics of social adjustment and possible decreases in academic achievement.

### 3.2.3.3. *Cultural Diversity in Classroom*

Most of the parents in the study expressed the view that their children had had diverse cultural experiences before moving to Tartu because of the family's travels, interest in international issues, diverse backgrounds of family members or previous transitions. The parents in the study seemed to be fully aware of positive effects of international lifestyle on their children. To nearly all parents moving to another country was seen as a great possibility to introduce their children to different cultures; this was seen as a benefit for their future. ... *I think it is a huge benefit for the children to go back to their own country with that in their suitcase, that people are [stressed by the parent] different all over the world. Because I do believe that the children learn a lot compared to if you stay together in the classroom with children who are almost like yourself. Then you can easily believe that everybody all over the world is almost like yourself.* (Parent 1)

Educators and researchers often describe these children as well travelled, interested in learning new languages, tolerant, experiencing fewer social problems than geographically stable peers (Langford, 1998). These interpersonal traits are something that international schools promote and develop, and surely any parent wishes to see in their children. The researcher's personal experiences in working with internationally mobile children confirm that the school's effort to develop interpersonal and social skills pays fully off. One way of doing it is to increase the number of personal and social education lessons in school curriculum and involve all children in extra-curricular activities such as clubs, field trips and social events.

When asked to describe what cultural differences their children had experienced in the new schools, the parents mentioned the following themes: traditions, patterns of behaviour, language, content of a curriculum and religion. On some occasions the parents also talked about how difficult it had been for their children to get used to the food that the schools provided. This might seem an issue of less importance for the schools that educate internationally mobile children at first. However, it may play an important role in cultural adjustment of a child. Eating is a way of social interaction: friends are made, problems discussed and solved at lunch tables; no one should be left aside from there. Serving special

lunches to children with health problems is not new in most schools in Tartu. It seems that it's still a long way to go to serving kosher or vegetarian meals at schools, however it won't be long until the schools have a number of students who will need it.

Whereas serving lunches to children with diverse cultural backgrounds is a "hidden curriculum", practising cultural events has become a norm in a school that caters for internationally mobile community. The examples below by the two mothers in the study describe how important it is for schools to communicate cultural traditions of the new school to the parents:

*One thing that I remember every year to inform new parents about is that the tradition in Estonia that when the school year starts you normally bring a flower to the teacher and same at the graduation ceremony, and so on. Because that's not normal all over the world. And I still remember the first year that it was a little bit embarrassed to come because we did not bring anything, because we didn't know it and so on. (Parent 1)*

*... and also this that there's a Teachers' Day and then my daughter said: "Oh the others had flowers!" and I said that we don't have this, you know, we are not used to something like this. It happened also ... [laughs]. OK, it happened the first year but now I know! (Parent 4)*

From the personal experience it can be said that these two examples by the mothers in the study – not being informed about Estonian school traditions for the first school day and the Teachers' Day, are typical ones that expatriate parents describe. Teachers advise expatriate parents about timetables or what supplies are needed at school. Saying that it is a tradition to bring flowers to **me** may be uncomfortable for a teacher. The schools can solve this issue by simply adding a line to a first-day-of-school or graduation invitation about tradition to bring flowers to the teacher.

A child's personality is shaped by his or her culture. Culture influences how we behave and how we make friends. Nearly all parents in the study believed that being a member of a culturally diverse group has exposed their children to different patterns of behaviour: *...there are different behaviours of different people from different countries. So [my son] is also exposed to this. In [our home country] it is more like informal, everything is very informal and people usually have less patience this way. (Parent 3)*

*And we sometimes had some discussions [with my child] about what you think is normal is maybe not normal for the rest of the children. So it gave some discussions about behaviours: what is right behaviour and what is good behaviour. (Parent 1)*

One parent whose children go to an Estonian-speaking school expressed that the Estonian culture is much more introverted than their own culture, and this may play a role in how

children make friends in a new school. *So that's probably the main cultural difference I can pinpoint with the kids. My daughter is so outgoing, she has overcome that. Now my son ..., that's a bit more of a challenge for him ... he's not so outgoing.* (Parent 6)

Understanding when a student behaves in a certain way due to his or her cultural backgrounds or because of personal attitudes, is a delicate issue. As a teacher of internationally mobile children I have experienced an occasion where a pupil was extremely reluctant to express his personal opinion on anything in the lessons. The school team had hesitations whether the pupil was placed with suitable year level and programme. Discussion with the parents revealed that in their culture and previous educational experience of the child, an open discussion with the teacher was not appropriate. One mother in the study acknowledged that it can be a challenge for the school to find a balance there: *So to explain to seven-year-old children that what you think is normal maybe not normal for your classmates... [pause] ...so that's a huge challenge to find a common way to school here.* (Parent 1)

According to Ezra (2003) verbal communication is an important social skill that is required for acculturation. As described by one parent fitting in a new cultural environment was difficult for her child, probably because she did not speak the language of the classmates: *...I think that the girls try to talk to my daughter and play with her but after a while it's just too frustrating because they can't talk to each other, and so they all stop because it's just too difficult. You know, why I'm going to sit there and just try, try, try to talk to this girl when I got my other friends I can talk to and play with. And so those I guess are the only specifically cultural things, which is really hard to fit in especially if you don't speak the language.* (Parent 2)

The parents in the study were discussed different ways of behaviour and other cultural diversity questions at home, and in one case the school counsellor was involved as well, and found very helpful: *And then my son he had a lot of issues with not fitting in ... but the counsellor helped.* (Parent 2)

Curricula that the schools in Tartu use for internationally mobile children are different, vary from a programme for the Estonian schools and students to the one especially designed for globally mobile children. One interview, especially, revealed that the Estonian national curriculum may not, understandably, accommodate to the children with diverse ethnic backgrounds. The mother gave enriching examples of school work, which demanded knowledge *that you knew from the grandparents about Estonia, really, some typical things ... something that we cannot tell her* (Parent 4); for instance the meaning of the Estonian archaic

or special dialect words, or understanding linguistic and cultural context in word problems. As another example the mother told a story how her daughter needed to tell about the Singing Revolution<sup>3</sup> for her school work. Completing this task was probably more challenging for the expatriate family than it was for an Estonian family. The teachers who educate children from diverse ethnic backgrounds need to be aware that for expatriate students the contents of the learning programme may need adaptations.

Global trends such as population mobility, or increase and decrease in birth rates, are always reflected in schools. Today the question should not be any more about simply finding a spot in the classroom for an internationally mobile child. It is about how to provide education that takes into consideration their cultural and ethnic backgrounds and needs, including the food they eat because of religious or ethnic reasons, and their prior knowledge and skills.

#### 3.2.4. The Nature of School Involvement of the Internationally Mobile Parents in Tartu

Parents of internationally mobile children “wear many hats” as expressed by M. Hayden (2006, p. 21): they parent their children; they are members of school or management boards, committees and activity groups.

The mothers and fathers in the study wore many hats as well. All parents were fully involved in school through parenting their children. The mothers and fathers described how they communicated with the teachers and other parents; they made phone calls, sent e-mails, and used e-kool (e-school), which is a student information network for general education and vocational schools. The parents followed their child’s progress at school and helped with homework, participated in school events, meetings and parent-teacher conferences; many of them regularly visited the school, and talked to the teachers.

##### 3.2.4.1. *Home-School Communication*

The majority of parents in the study accentuated the importance of home-school communication. The interviews suggested the parents believed that open communication had helped their children to get better adjusted to a new school, or had helped to overcome transition difficulties.

---

<sup>3</sup> The **Singing Revolution** is a commonly used name for events between 1987 and 1990 that led to the restoration of the independence of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, mainly in Estonia. Retrieved May 28, 2010, from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Singing\\_Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Singing_Revolution).

*Although after some months or two he started, there was a crisis. I spoke with [the Head Teacher]. I think I was also in touch with [the Class Teacher]. And we just shared that this is the issue ... And in general the awareness that he was under some stress I think it was helpful also. (Parent 3)*

*And it has always been for me and my husband very important to communicate with the teachers, and if there was something that they maybe saw that my son did not understand correctly, then we take a talk with him when he comes home in his mother tongue and explain that there's a reason why ... (Parent 1)*

It is believed that without support network of an extended family the ultimate nuclear family its ties and may become more open in relation to each other and to others (McLachlan, 2007). One mothers in the study described her family as a very open one, and believed openness had helped her and her husband to communicate to the school and teachers in an open way as well. After the interview the same mother expressed the view that living abroad had been the best thing they had done as a family.

Different factors can influence communication between school and home, including the languages we speak, the countries we come from, or how we interact with others. One mother emotionally describes her experiences in communicating with the school: *So for us it has been very easy because it's normal for the country where I come from if you have a question, just ask! And if you don't understand the answer, ask again! And that was what I did. ...I could see the teachers who had been in [this school] for several years though it was normal because they had met people from different countries. But for newly educated Estonian teachers I could see that they were not that used to those silly parents that ask and ask and ask, and say: "What do you think about that?", and "What about this?", and "Is this a good idea?". (Parent 1)*

The example above reveals an issue of teacher training – are the teachers ready to educate internationally mobile children in their classes? Teachers' skills and readiness to teach expatriate children was a theme that emerged from other interviews as well. One father said it had been surprising for him that the teachers in his children's school did not speak English. Moreover, he described a situation at school where the issues of language skills and probable lack of teacher's readiness to work with an international student may be detectable: *This one teacher [...] spoke English but he wouldn't ..., like if she [my daughter] asked a question – was trying to understand something, he would never answer her in English. She would ask in English, he would answer in Estonian. I don't know what the problem was, she was just very upset about that class, we just pulled her out. (Parent 6)*



Furthermore, many parents expressed the view that it would have been extremely difficult, or even impossible, if they hadn't had a common language in which to talk to the teachers. They suggested that the schools should have a staff member, who could co-ordinate teacher-parent communication if talking directly was not possible because of language. One mother in the study suggested that a person in this position could be called *an international counsellor*, and was very happy that the school her children attended employed one. She said *it would have been terrible* if there had not been an international counsellor to help the family and the children, and concluded: *I think that school needs to have that, absolutely.* (Parent 4)

The mothers and fathers in the study were asked what the schools had done to encourage home-school communication. The interviews suggested that the schools must have communicated their administrative structure to the parents well – all of them knew whom to turn to with questions or problems concerning their children. Also, the parents expressed that the schools had actively invited them to talk about any issues they might have about school or their children. *...and the teacher always offers when there are problems please call me, or send an e-mail, or something...* (Parent 4) Furthermore, ethos of the school seemed to encourage home-school communication. For instance, one of the mothers said how she liked the school's *open-door policy* that invited her to step in and say hello rather than sending e-mails to the school.

#### 3.2.4.2. *Involvement in Volunteering and Decision-making*

It is characteristic to an internationally mobile family that the father is working extensively and experiences time periods away from his family because of work-related travels around the globe (McLachlan, 2008). Therefore, it's the mothers who typically volunteer, or are members of different committees at school.

Not surprisingly it was a case of this study also. One father expressed that being involved at school through a special function was difficult *due to complete lack of time*. Another father explained that he had made a conscious decision not to have any special functions at school because he was fully occupied with his work and family. It is important to stress that father absence does not mean un-involvement; the interviews indicated that the fathers in the study were actively involved in their children's education through parenting, home-school communication and curriculum-related activities.

The internationally mobile mothers have a central role in their children's education.

McLachlan (2007) studied 45 families on how they managed their transient lifestyles. One of the strategies that the families employed was that the mothers became actively involved in their children's schools to monitor their children and ease their transition. In return the international school in the study took advantage of the large number of mothers who carried out some functions at the school. One mother in the study described how she had always volunteered if any help at school was needed. On a voluntary basis she had been a substitute teacher and run a cooking course, which was a part of the school's curriculum, at her home for the students. She commented her voluntary involvement as follows: *That's a great pleasure!* Another mother had volunteered to assist the teacher during the field trips.

Some of the parents in the study were involved in school through a special function, such as being a member of a decision-making body at school. For instance, one mother had been a private school management board member for three years, and at the time of an interview she was a school board member. Another mother explained that however she was not a member of any official decision-making bodies, together with the other parents they had developed a well-functioning communication network: *But we are managing it on our own with the parents ... we are sending e-mails on this and that, and then you just say what's your opinion about this, or what we should do for Christmas, or like this. So it's some open discussion.* (Parent 4)

However, the parents in the study generally felt that their voices were heard by the teachers at school, the vast majority of them were not aware of how decisive school bodies, such as school board, function. McKenzie (1998) expresses his view that many schools that educate internationally mobile children are basically homogeneous in their teacher composition and school governing bodies. He continues with a Terwilliger's (1972) thought that ideally a board of governors of an international school is made up of nationalities roughly the same proportions as the student body that is served by this school. This model promotes greater partnership and should be applied to all types of schools in Tartu that educate internationally mobile children: English- or Estonian-speaking, private or municipality.

The interviews suggested that the schools may not have communicated their policies of parent involvement properly to the parents of internationally children. One mother in the study wondered if volunteering is something that the parents do in schools in Tartu. The mother wished she had been more involved with the school: *I mean it would have been nice if I could have stayed involved. ... there have been field trips but my kids just went off, I wasn't asked to participate and I didn't ask because I'm busy with the other kids home schooling.* (Parent 2)

Not having a common language to communicate with the school seemed to be another factor that hindered active parent involvement in schools.

The parents in the study were also asked what had encouraged their involvement in school. The answers confirmed that the school's positive atmosphere and an invitation to become involved were the factors that had encouraged parent involvement most: *I think it started up that way that I said if you ever need any help, just please let me know.* (Parent 1)

*...and the teacher always offer that when there are problems, please call me or, send an e-mail or something...* (Parent 4)

Inviting the parents to volunteer, or join a decision-making body may be a culturally sensitive theme. One mother in the study expressed a view that in some cultures volunteering is not obvious and presumable; and several parents found that it was important to find a balance between what the new school expected and what the parents had been used to earlier in terms of parent involvement: *... I think that, yes of course you can always do more but I also think that it can be dangerous to push too much because then maybe as a parent will feel that [the school] is almost eating me up or something. ... For newcomers maybe they think they will be overloaded if they had 20 e-mails.* (Parent 1)

*... My parents didn't have any role in school, that was optimal for me then. And it's a sort of balance – I don't want to interfere, [let] the teachers do their job, I do my tasks, and if I can support, that's OK! I sort of accept what is coming from [the school].* (Parent 5)

Schools that educate internationally mobile children should be aware of dynamics that may affect parent involvement. Internationally mobile fathers may be frequently away from their families due to the travel demands of their occupations (McLachlan, 2008). During my work with internationally mobile families I have experienced that expatriate mothers may lack English language proficiency to communicate with the school. This issue can be illustrated by a mother in the study, who described what she had noticed about it: *...I can see, when I look back, that sometimes the problem is that if the fathers are not in Estonia – they are abroad, then some of the children have problems with making their homework because they have no help at home ... I think that one thing that the school could do is that every year try to start up some English lessons for mums. And try to tell them that this is not because you're missing [English language] skills. It's the matter of then you'll be able to help your children with homework ...* (Parent 1)

The schools need to keep in mind that organising childcare for the afternoon or evening may be complicated for internationally mobile families since they do not have a network of extended families nearby. Therefore the activities that are addressed to support parent

involvement, such as language lessons or parent education courses, should be held during regular working hours of the school.

It needs to be stressed, again, that the schools that educate internationally mobile children have a mandate to address a whole family. There are many ways how to encourage parental involvement at school. One of them is to develop a policy on school involvement, and clearly communicate it to the parents. From the researcher's personal experience an example can be given about Tartu international School. The school developed and implemented a parent involvement programme called Three of Me. The parents who sign up with the programme are entitled to 3 volunteer hours during an academic year. These hours may involve taking part of the school's everyday life (e.g. fixing things at school, help to organise events, replace teachers); take part of school management (e.g. get involved in school board or management board); come up with new ideas (e.g. fund-raising events, planning an event).

### 3.2.5. Implications for Schools and Decision-makers

It is imperative that the people working with internationally mobile children and their families combine efforts to meet the children's emotional, social and academic needs.

Several suggestions for school applications and decision-makers' interest emerged from the interviews with internationally mobile parents in Tartu. Many of the parents' suggestions were presented in the previous chapter along with the analysis of the themes of transition process, school selection, adjustment and parental involvement. The current chapter, however, condenses and summarizes these parental suggestions. The researcher's experiences as the head teacher and English language teacher at a school that educates internationally mobile children in Tartu are supplemented where relevant.

#### 3.2.5.1. *Transition Support*

Developing support programmes for internationally mobile children and their families is a responsibility of any school catering for the international community. Transition programmes should be aimed at supporting transition and adjustment of internationally mobile children, and involve their parents in this process.

The parents in the study described several activities that they did before moving to Tartu. The schools that educate internationally mobile children should contribute to the efforts of the parents and offer support already before the children arrive. Therefore transition programming

should include prior-to-the-move activities as suggested by one of the parents in the study: for example bringing together an “old” and a “new” expatriate family, assigning a contact person to each family, introducing the school and classmates to a relocating child already before the move.

Transition programme after arrival of a child could include a buddy programme, an induction day, and rituals on occasion of a new student’s enrolment in school. Transition should be supported in lessons through subject disciplines and choice of methods as suggested by several researchers. (for example Hayden & Hill, 2008; Schaetti, 1996)

The schools in Tartu that educate internationally mobile children could join their experiences and expertise there. Support programmes need to be modelled and documented, and effectively communicated to the parents.

### 3.2.5.2. *Language Support*

Some parents in the study stated that it would have been difficult for them to keep in touch with the school if they hadn’t known the language of the school. In some cases, however, the parents could not talk to the teachers of their children directly. Although they had a person at school whom they could contact in case of questions, direct talking to the teachers was difficult due to the language barrier.

Offering language courses (e.g. English or Estonian) at school may be a way both to involve parents in school, as well as help them to develop their language skills if necessary. The author of this research has experienced that it may be difficult for the parents of young children to attend school activities in case they are held in the evenings. Internationally mobile families do not usually have a support network of friends and relatives nearby. Therefore it may be necessary to organize courses and activities during usual work-hours of the school; alternatively childcare should be organized at school premises.

Native language studies at school help internationally mobile children to maintain a strong connection with their own culture and language. In addition Ezra (2003, p. 145) states following: “Home-language maintenance assists second-language development since concepts may be transferred from one language to another.” Thus the schools should, if possible, offer native language and culture lessons as a part of curriculum. The Estonian Ministry of Education and Research supports schools that educate internationally mobile children in doing so. Valuable support could be gained from the parents also; they could be involved in teaching native language to the children.

Nearly all parents in the study reported that their children had, to some extent, continued learning reading and writing in native language at home also. The schools could support parents' intentions by providing school facilities where home-language instruction may be held. Teachers should be aware that the children who attend home-language classes have extra homework; this needs to be considered when assigning homework.

### 3.2.5.3. *Curriculum Concerns*

The parents in the study described four different programmes that their children followed in Tartu. It is always a question what makes a school an international school – an internationally acknowledged curriculum, student body, composition of the staff or something else. In fact there is no clear consensus about the definition of an international school, however it appears that most of the definitions include a description of their populations as a feature. (Langford, 1998)

The author of this study shares an understanding that the following features are characteristic to an international school: multinational student body, high levels of student turnover, cultural development of a child is influenced by the culture of the host country and the various cultures at school, multicultural curriculum that does not concentrate on any national curricula, culturally diverse teacher and management board body.

The people who work with internationally mobile children should be aware that success in academics is tied up with social adjustment of a child. Sometimes parental expectations to academic achievement may put a lot of pressure on a child may hinder his or her adjustment to school. The schools of internationally mobile children should raise the teachers' and parents' awareness of possible temporary decrease in academic performance due to limited language proficiency or adjustment difficulties.

The interviews with the internationally mobile children suggested that in some cases the schools had difficulties in finding an optimal learning programme for the children. Thus it is important for the schools to develop a model how to elicit prior knowledge from a child, so that an optimal programme could be adopted with a student.

Good interpersonal skills help internationally mobile children to manage challenges that they face due to their mobile lifestyles: dealing with loss and grief, making new friends and adjusting in a new community. Therefore the subjects that develop interpersonal skills (e.g. Personal and Social Education) should be accentuated in school curriculum. Volume, contents and methodology of these subjects need to be overviewed, evaluated and developed.

Interactive methodology that supports making friends and socialization should be integrated in various other subjects.

It is a common understanding that lessons like the arts or music are a good way of integrating internationally mobile children into the school's student body in an Estonian-speaking school. Some parents in the study described, however, that their children had felt frustrated in these lessons because they could not understand or speak the language. The Arts, Music, and Manual Training are the subjects that give lots of ways for internationally mobile students to express themselves, but of course if they can understand instructions on how to make a wooden boat, or join in a song. Based on the parents' responses and the researcher's experience it can be suggested that these lessons should always be taught in English for internationally mobile children.

A curriculum that is composed by the principles of multicultural education is today a norm of any school that educates internationally mobile children. More attention should be paid, however, to a hidden curriculum. Multicultural attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviour need to become an integral part of the ethos of a school that caters for the international community.

#### 3.2.5.4. *Involving the Internationally Mobile Parents in School:*

##### *From Volunteering to Decision-making*

The interviews with internationally mobile families suggested that parental involvement for parents may be hindered due to a reason that they are not aware of the school's policies for parental involvement. The schools could develop a parental involvement policy for all parents. The specifics of an internationally mobile family, however, should be kept in mind here. For example, the role of international mothers in their children's education is central and the mothers wish to be more involved in their children's school.

Schools that cater for the internationally mobile community in Tartu are municipality schools or privately run. Management of a school usually involves different bodies – the board of owners, school board, head teacher and administrative staff. For school development it is essential that these bodies have similar educational philosophy and share the school's vision and mission. Some of the mentioned management bodies can afford a more idealistic approach to the school and concentrate on vision and mission; the others deal with day-to-day questions of the students, parents and staff. However, all parties need to co-operate in order to provide education that meets the needs of the student population at school.

Ideally the management board of a school should represent the diversity of students learning at this school. The research revealed, however, that the parents of internationally mobile children in Tartu were not aware of policy and practice of school management in Estonia. The schools could encourage and invite the parents to take part in decision-making at school either through being a member of management and/or school board at a private school, or having a membership in a school board at a municipality school. Schools may argue this suggestion by telling that representing parents in a school board is a question of election. Furthermore, it is possible for the owner body of a school to determine composition of a school board with their statute.

#### *3.2.5.5. Modelling and Developing International Education in Tartu*

The vast majority of the parents of internationally mobile children want their children to be educated in English. It was relatively difficult for some parents in the study to find a suitable educational set up for their children in Tartu. As suggested by one parent in the study there should be a focused, fully English-speaking programme for internationally mobile children in Tartu.

The schools that educate internationally mobile children have demonstrated and proved their strong sides, and acknowledged their weaknesses. Experiences and knowledge of these schools should be consolidated, and a functioning international education model for Tartu developed.

The awareness of internationally mobile family dynamics, educational needs, transition phases, and challenges that these families meet when relocating is the basis of modelling international education. Therefore the experts and practitioners in the arena of internationally mobile children and international education should be involved in this process.



## References

- 2010 *Global Relocation Trends Survey*. (2010). Retrieved April 29, 2010, from [http://www.brookfieldgrs.com/insights\\_ideas/grts](http://www.brookfieldgrs.com/insights_ideas/grts).
- Abouchaar, A., & Desforges, C. (2003). *The Impact of Parental Involvement, Parental Support and Family Education on Pupil Achievement and Adjustment: A Literature Review*. Nottingham: Queen's Printer.
- Cadden, M., & Kittell, A. (s.a.). *Shrinking World, Broadening Horizons Changes in International Relocation in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Retrieved April 29, 2010, from [http://www.figt.org/free\\_articles.php](http://www.figt.org/free_articles.php).
- Copeland, A. P. (2007). Welcoming International Parents to Your Classroom. *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, 43(2), 66–70.
- Copeland, A. P., & Meckman, S. (2002). *Women Expatriates: A View of their Own*. Retrieved May 2, 2010, from [http://www.figt.org/free\\_articles.php](http://www.figt.org/free_articles.php).
- Dixon, P., & Hayden, M. (2008). "On the Move": Primary Age Children in Transition. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 38(4), 483–496.
- Epstein, J. L. (s.a.). *Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement*. Retrieved May 18, 2010, from <http://www.cpirc.org/vertical/Sites/%7B95025A21-DD4C-45C2-AE37-D35CA63B7AD9%7D/uploads/%7B1310DD65-F94A-457D-A680-9EE824084458%7D.PDF>.
- Ezra, R. (2003). Culture, Language and Personality in the Context of the Internationally Mobile Child. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 2: 123–149.
- Ferrera, M. M. (2009). Broadening the Myopic Vision of Parent Involvement. *The School Community Journal*, 19(2), 123–142.
- Haldimann, M. (1998). Special Learning Needs in International Schools: The Optimal Match Concept. In M. Hayden, & J. Thompson (Eds.), *International Education. Principles and Practice* (pp. 132–145). London: Kogan Page.
- Hayden, M. (2006). *Introduction to International Education. International Schools and their Communities*. London: Sage.
- Hayden, M., & Hill, S. (2008). Children on the Move: Using Pollock's Transition Model for better Understanding of Internationally Mobile Primary-aged Pupils. *International Schools Journal*, 27, 27–43.
- Hayden, M., MacKenzie, P., & Thompson, J. (2001). The Third Constituency: Parents in International Schools. *International Schools Journal*, 20(2), 57–64.

- Hayden, M., MacKenzie, P., & Thompson, J. (2003). Parental Priorities in the Selection of International Schools. *Oxford Review of Education*, 29(3), 299–314.
- Helping People Abroad (s.a.). Retrieved April 29, 2010, from <http://www.justlanded.com/english/Common/Footer/About-us>.
- Henderson, A. T., & Mapp, K. L. (2002). *A New Wave of Evidence. The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*. Southwest Educational Development Lab., Austin, TX.
- HSBC Bank International (s.a.). *Expat Explorer Survey 2009*. Retrieved April 20, 2010, from <http://www.offshore.hsbc.com/1/2/international/expat/expat-survey/expat-experience-report-2009>.
- IB Fast Facts. (2010). (Retrieved June 2010) <http://www.ibo.org/facts/fastfacts>.
- Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*. London: Sage.
- Laherand, M.-L. (2008). *Kvalitatiivne uurimisviis*. Tallinn: Infotrükk.
- Langford, M. (1998). Global Nomads, Third Culture Kids and International Schools. In M. Hayden, & J. Thompson (Eds.), *International Education. Principles and Practice* (pp. 28–43). London: Kogan Page.
- MacKenzie, M. (1998). Going, Going, gone... Global! In M. Hayden, & J. Thompson (Eds.), *International Education. Principles and Practice* (pp. 242–251). London: Kogan Page.
- McLachlan, D. A. (2007). Global Nomads in an International School: Families in Transition. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 6(2), 233–249.
- McLachlan, D. A. (2008). Family Involvement in PSE: International Schools Easing the Transition of Mobile Families. *Pastoral Care in Education*, 26(2), 91–101.
- Mullis, I. V. S., Martin, M. O., & Foy, P. (2008). *TIMSS 2007 International Mathematics Report*. Chestnut Hill, MA: TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Centre, Boston College.
- Pollock, D. (2004). *Interview with Dr. David Pollock by B. D. Roman*. Retrieved May 7, 2010, from [http://www.figt.org/free\\_articles.php](http://www.figt.org/free_articles.php).
- Ramsey, S. J., & Schaetti, B. F. (1999). *The Expatriate Family: Practicing Practical Leadership*. Retrieved May 2, 2010, from <http://www.transition-dynamics.com>.
- Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (1995). *Qualitative interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Schaetti, B. F. (1996). *Transition Programming in International Schools: An Emergent Mandate*. Retrieved May 4, 2010, from <http://www.transition-dynamics.com>.

- Schaetti, B. F. (s.a.). *Families on the Move: Working Together to Meet the Challenge*. Retrieved April 29, 2010, from <http://www.transition-dynamics.com>.
- Schaetti, B. F. (s.a.). *Global Nomad, Third Culture Kid, Adult Third Culture Kid, Third Culture Adult: What do they All Mean?* Retrieved April 29, 2010, from [http://www.figt.org/free\\_articles.php](http://www.figt.org/free_articles.php).
- Shortland, S. (2010). *Recent Trends in International Assignments*. Retrieved March 19, 2010, from <http://www.relocatemagazine.com/index.php/international-assignments/international-assignment-articles/1137-recent-trends-in-international-assignments>.
- Vogel, D. (Ed.). (2008). *Highly Active Immigrants. A resource for European Civil Societies*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- Witzel, A. (2000). *The Problem-centered Interview*. Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/ Forum: *Qualitative Social Research*, 1(1), Art. 22. (Retrieved April 2010) <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0001228>.